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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SANTO DOMINGO 005779

SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/CAR (MCISAAC)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/15/2009

TAGS: [PINR](#) [EFIN](#) [KJUS](#) [PGOV](#) [DR](#) [CASTILLO](#) [VINICIO](#) [MARINO](#)

SUBJECT: DOMINICAN ATTORNEY VINCHO CASTILLO - STILL KICKING AT 73

REF: A. 00 SANTO DOMINGO 01712

[1](#)B. 04 SANTO DOMINGO 05426

Classified By: Lisa Kubiske, Deputy Chief of Missions, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) "Those who love me, love me a lot. Those who hate me, hate me a lot," declared Marino Vinicio Castillo (Vinchito) when questioned by a reporter in 2000 about his reputation for controversy. It was a good self-characterization then and remains true today. Vinchito, a well known attorney who heads a family law firm that is one of the oldest in the Dominican Republic, remains in the public spotlight at age 73. He is currently defense counsel for Ramon Baez Figueroa ("Ramoncito"), one of six accused of various fraudulent acts in conjunction with the failure of Banco Intercontinental (Baninter) in 2003. Vinchito is not keeping quiet on the high profile case. Whether you characterize him as a defender of crooks or a zealous advocate for his clients, he remains front and center in Dominican legal circles and in politics.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Vinchito Castillo began practicing law in 1954, during the Trujillo dictatorship. He has been a constant on the political scene almost since that time. Over the past 50 years he has served as the President of the National Council on Drugs (1996-2000), run for President on the ticket of a political party he founded (the Progressive National Force Party) (1986), counseled former President Joaquin Balaguer on countering accusations of widespread election fraud (1978), successfully prosecuted former President Jorge Blanco on corruption charges (1986-87), served in the Dominican Congress (1961), and been an on-and-off-again presence in the Dominican media as a radio and TV talk show host and guest. He prominently supported the 2004 presidential effort of Leonel Fernandez, prompting speculation that there was a deal cooking that would favor Baez. Over the past six months it seems that Vinchito has been in the media almost daily.

[1](#)3. (U) During Castillo's stint as President of the drug council, a cabinet-level position, he was known for his outspoken opposition to narcotics trafficking and all associated activities. He was credited with keeping counternarcotics efforts near the center of Dominican political debates during President Fernandez's first term and with helping the USG secure implementation of a 1910 bilateral extradition treaty that had lain dormant for over 80 years.

[1](#)4. (C) In a meeting in February 2000 with then U.S. Ambassador Charles Manatt, Vinchito said that off-shore banking activities in the Dominican Republic were broader than most people realized. He maintained that there were no longer any borders between narcotics trafficking, money laundering and terrorism. In that same conversation, Vinchito linked discussions of extradition and money laundering by saying, "Extradition of street killers is one thing, but the Dominican Republic will really make progress when it extradites a corrupt banker." (reftel A).

[1](#)5. (C) His 2000 views seem to us to be right on the mark - he is now defending a banker who may have broken not only Dominican laws, but U.S. laws. Ramon Baez's involvement in the failure of Baninter is well documented, but his case has not yet reached the trial stage in the Dominican courts (reftel B). An ongoing investigation in the Southern District of Florida may provide the basis for a criminal case against Baez there. If that should occur, there can be little doubt that Castillo would provide the most zealous defense possible to oppose any attempt by the USG to extradite Baez to stand trial in the United States.

[1](#)6. (C) Castillo defended Baez not only in the courtroom but also in the court of public opinion. At every opportunity, Vinchito claims that Baez is not guilty and that the true culprits in the Baninter failure are former Central Bank Governor Lois Malkum and former Superintendent of Banks Julio Cross. Vinchito made headlines in recent weeks with totally unfounded charges that the U.S. and Canadian ambassadors were pressuring the courts for conviction of Baez. Vinchito blustered that he was thinking of suing both diplomats; Supreme Court Chief Justice Jorge Subero Isa told reporters that the judiciary was not under pressure and would not heed

any such efforts to influence it.

17. (C) Vincho has said that should the case progress against Baez, he will file counter-suits against numerous former officials who held office under President Mejia. Last week he called formally on the local office of the Organization of American States to assert that the legal team will be filing a brief with the InterAmerican Court of Human Rights because interrogations have begun without the delivery to the defense of the full 40,000 pages of evidence held by the investigating magistrate. Vincho's long memory, success in prior endeavors, and the potential of files filled with political fodder, make his public threats ones that merit the attention of a government led by a President who may have known during his first term of Baninter's penchant for questionable dealings.

18. (C) During the transition period before President Fernandez took office for the second time, Vincho Castillo's name was rumored by numerous Embassy sources to be in the running for Attorney General or Legal Advisor to the President. He was not named to either post. We have been told that Vincho had no desire to take on a government job at this time as it would deprive him of the substantial fees he is earning from the Baez family.

19. (SBU) Although 73, Vincho remains a much-feared player on the Dominican legal field. Two of his sons are following in his footsteps. Pelegrin Castillo Seman is a representative in the Dominican Congress and Vinicio Castillo Seman is an attorney in the family firm. Vincho has one other son and a daughter.

110. (C) Vincho shows no signs of slowing down. With force and craft he continues a ferocious defense of Baez that many think will keep that crook safe, sound and out of jail. Vincho's success, however merited it would be on technical grounds, would be a discredit and setback for prospects of reinforcing the rule of law in the Dominican Republic.

111. (U) Drafted by Angela Kerwin.

112. (U) This piece and others can be found at our SIPRNET site <http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/wha/santodomingo/> along with extensive other material.
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